MUSAHARA : CASTE IDENTITY, ECONOMY & CULTURE OF MITHILA (1947-2020)

LALIT NARAYAN MITHILA UNIVERSITY, DARBHANGA

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCE

SYNOPSIS

SUBMITTED IN FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

RESEARCH SUPERVISIOR

DR. ABDUL WAHAB
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR
R.K. COLLEGE, MADHUBANI
L.N.M.U, DARBHANGA

RESEARCH SCHOLAR

NTISH KUMAR
ROLL. NO- E2210100

Musahara : Caste Identity, Economy & Culture of Mithila (1947-2020)

Introduction

Musahar are said to be one of the poorest amongst the scheduled caste in India. They are found in the state of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Orissa & eastern Uttar Pradesh. In Bihar the Musahar are distributed in Bhagalpur, Monghyr, Purnea, Gaya, Muzaffarpur, Darbhanga, Madhubani, Saran, Champaran & Bhojpur districts. According to Risley Musahar are an offshoot of the Bhuiya tribe of Chotanagpur, having migrated to paddy cultivable areas of what is currently Bihar, probably from the 12^{th} century & have been the single largest source of agriculture labor in the region since. The popular saying of which I could find during work, suggests that the term Musahar signifies flesh seeker or hunter. Another view holds that Musahar means rat taker or rat eater. They speak Indo-Aryan language, Angika, Maithili, Bhojpuri, Maghi at home. Hindi is spoken with other communities & Devanagari is the script used. They are non-vegetarian & relish rat meat & pork. Consumption of alcoholic drinks, smoking, chewing Tabacco and use of snuff are common. The Musahar are divided into exogamous clans, Manjhi, Mandal & Musahar are their surnames. They are Monogamous. During the British period, this caste was kept in the category of depressed classes. After the first census in 1871, for the first time, this caste was given the status of tribe by putting in a separate category. People of Musahar community make bricks. They plough the field and cultivate rice. They construct houses, roads and bridges. Women have role in agriculture, economy, social & ritual spheres and contribute to family income. Only few Musahar own lands & are cultivators. They are largely landless agriculture laborer. Some of them are engaged as laborer in industries, forest & fishing. A few others pull rickshaws, stitch leaf plates and rear silkworm. They profess Hinduism and generally Hindu goddess, including Dinabhadri & Baniya Baba in their family deity. A research study carried out by the Bihar Educational Society (1999-2000) found that schooling among the Musahar girls is 0%. Total literacy among them is between 4 to 7%. They mostly believed in magic, traditional method and naturopathy for the betterment of health. The Musahar have no inhibitions in accepting food and water from other Hindu communities except the Chamar. The household survey carried out by the Planning Commision in the state revealed that out of 392 scheduled castes only 18.4% own cultivable land, & 11.2% possesses assets. The Musahar in Bihar have neither land nor agricultural assets. The Musahar are landless, honest & sincere having a good physique.

Literary review

I) Risley, Herbert. (1915) It gives a very full & scholarly account concerning the people of India. It classifies the people according to their physical, social appearance. It too explains caste, religion, rituals of caste & marriage.

II) Buchanan, Francis. (1928) it contains an enormous mass of information on the land & the people. The materials on caste are valuables; it gives idea how this institution actually works in a sample region.

III) Byrne, J. (1911) has made an attempt to depict the social, cultural & political life of people of Bhagalpur district of Bihar. He almost records all the information, especially the life of Dalits.

IV) O'Malley, L.S.S. (1907-1926) through district gazetteers of Purnea, Monghyr, Darbhanga, he briefly explains about caste system, economy, culture, indigo farming, industries, transport & communication. He explains each & every sphere of human life.

V) Blunt, E.A.H. (1969) briefly explain how Hindu groups are divided into various castes. What was the nature of the caste system in India, its evolution into various subcastes. He too explains various primitive customs which are once prevalent among various casts.

VI) Radhakrishnan, Menna. (2001) explores how colonial policies converted itinerate groups on the one hand into a source of cheap Laboure on the other into a category known as criminal tribes. It also examines the missionary activity.

VII) Singh, Yogendra. (2009) he particularly examines concepts and processes of castes, class & peasantry, elites, social mobility, structural differentiations policy of reservation & its impact in SCs/STs/OBCs.

VIII) Archer, W.G, edited by Hetukar Jha. (2015) contains the information about Musahar leader Saini Musahar who had launched a movement around 1934-35 to ameliorate the condition of people of his community. He described corruption, exploitation & punishment amongst Mahadalit community.

IX) Choudhary, Prasana Kumar. (2015) has attempted to explain the life of Dalits in Bihar, especially the movement led by them against the social & political issues as well as government policy.

X) Tiwari, S.N. (2018) considering the social dimension of poverty, an attempt has been made to probe the poverty of the Musahar Dalit caste, especially various types of disabilities, exploitation & starving's have been analyzed.

XI) Ghai, Rahul; Mishra, Arvind Kr (2020) questions the century-old perception of the Musahara community as rat-eater, pig-rearing, habitual drunk, lazy & unmotivated. A perception fostered by the dominant discource of development, and the historically prevalent hierarchical social system.

Research Problem

As already mentioned, Musahar is one of the poorest primitive scheduled castes, having 40 lakh population in Bihar, but the social life of Musahars is akin to that of primitive societies, extreme suffering attending every phase of life from birth till death. Education amongst them was almost non-existent, the literacy- rate being only 6%, considered as one of the untouchables, but the so-called high castes, middle castes never hesitate in sexually exploiting them. Their economy is primitive. Musahar although honest and sincere were listed in the criminal cases and tribes list prepared by the colonial authorities. They are victims of untouchability even today. Their houses are demolished, their dwellings are set on fire and they are being murdered. They are suffered with physical and mental health issue. There is only some written record on the Musahar. Among Dalits it is Musahar who has to face the violation of Human Right in day-to-day life.

Research Objective

The study has been undertaken with following objectives: -

(I) To explore the socio-economic condition and life of the Musahar from a human rights point of view.
(II) To analyse their condition, occupation and process of exploitation.
(III) To find reasons coercing them in inhuman activities like child Laboure, crime, prostitution, beggary etc.
(IV) To find out why the Government measure or reservation policy fail to uplift the socio-economic condition of Musahar.
(V) To find out measure for the sustainable development.
(VI) To focus on the cause of extreme poverty & illiteracy, of the kind suffered by Musahars.
(VII) To examine the health consciousness and its barrier.

Importance Of The Study

Musahara population of Mithila, which is considered to be the indigenous along with other groups, is still poor. Musahara are one of the most under privileged group of Maithili speaking people. This study provides new insight about the Musahara of Mithila and will be also to enlighten the socio economic condition and cultural life of Musahara community of the study area.

Scope Of The Study

For the collection of Primary data & other related information for the study. Mithila region of Bihar has been selected. The main cause of the selection of this area for this study is that, the Musahara people were indigenous resident of this area and up till now they are poor, illiterate & deprived among other ethnic groups. Similarly, the study area more convenient place for the study because this Maithili speaking area (Mithila) is familiar to researcher

Hypothesis

Musahars are one of the most dishonored, exploited and marginalized section of the Hindu community. Being landless and untouchables, their socio-economic culture were not raised even by the reservation policy and other constitutional measures taken by the state as well as central government. This study will examine the threads of the changes among the Musahar community. It will examine the physical & mental health and effect on Magic, traditional method amongst them. It will also examine the measures taken by the other communities and government as well to uplift their overall development. This study will evaluate their caste-customs and rituals as tools for "their development and stagnation".

Methodology

I am primarily relied on two sets of data and information. First, a review of primary and secondary materials, which comprises the publications of the state as well as central government agencies, newspaper clippings and documents. Second, primary data is generated by means of direct observation, semi structured interview and informal conversation. I will also consult and explore the cultural songs, stories, stories of Musahar deities and other available socio-religious rituals. This research follows case-study methodology for it is helpful in capturing the complexity of the object of study through in-depth analysis of carefully selected cases for holistic result.

Primary source: -

I) An account of the Districts of Purnea in 1809-1810 by Francis Buchanan.
II) The people of India by Sir Herbert Risley.
III) The caste system of Northern Bihar by E.A.H. Blunt.
IV) Bengal District gazetteers- Purnea by L.S.S.O. Malley.
V) Bihar & Orissa District gazetteers- Monghyr by L.S.S.O. Malley.
VI) Bengal District gazetteers- Bhagalpur by J. Byrne.
VII) Bengal District gazetteers- Darbhanga by L.S.S.O. Malley.
VIII) Paper by W.G. Archer: - An account of Musahar movement in north Bihar before independence, edited by Hetukar Jha.

IX) People of India by W.G. Archer, edited by Hetukar Jha.

Secondary source: -

I) Dishonored by history: criminal tribe & British colonial policy by Meena Radhakrishnan.
II) Social stratification changes in India by Yojender Singh.
III) Musahara: a social economical study by Dr. Sachindra Narayan.
IV) Attack on swan: Dalit movement in Bihar 1912-2000 by P.K. Choudhary.
V) The tribal children in Bihar by Sachchidananda.
VI) Social disabilities of Harijans in Bihar by Anirudh Prasad, Rajan Verma, A.K. Thakur.
VII) Role of institution credit in tribal development by Shaibal Gupta & Anup K. Karan.
VIII) People's perception of harijans atrocities in Bihar by Anirudh Prasad.
IX) Harijans & land reforms in Bihar by Sachchindanand.
X) Indebtedness among harijans in Bihar by A.K. Daftuar.
XI) Study of rural unrest in Bihar by Indu Bharti.
XII) Musahars: what keeps Musahars entrapped in poverty by Sajjad Hassan.
XIII) Poverty among Musahars: Dalits of Bihar by Dr. S.N. Tiwary.

Tentative chapterization: -

The proposed chapterization of the study may be as under subject of some modification. Preliminaries: preface, acknowledgement, abstract, content, list of tables, list of figures, etc.

I) Identity & History
II) Social & Demographic Status
III) Economic Status
IV) Education & Cultural changes
V) Constitutional Safeguard & Government Provision
VI) Health Consciousness
VII) Conclusion

Appendices: bibliography, list of research related publication, maps, etc.

Bibliography: -

I) O'Malley, L.S.S.; Bengal District Gazetteers- Darbhanga, 1927, reprint, Logos press, New Delhi, 2013.

II) Byrne, J.; Bengal District Gazetteers- Bhagalpur, 1911, reprint, Logos press, New Delhi, 2011.

III) O'Malley, L.S.S.; Bengal District Gazetteers- Purnea, Bengal Secretariate book depo, Calcutta, 1911, reprint, Siliguri, 2011.

IV) Risley, Sir Herbert; The people of India, edited by W. Crooke, Low price publication, calcutta, 1915, reprint, Delhi,2003.

V) Buchanan, Francis; An account of the district of Purnea in 1809-10, 1928, reprint, Department of arts, culture & youth (department of Museums), Government of Bihar, Patna, 2013.

VI) O'Malley, L.S.S.; Bihar & Orissa District Gazetteers- Monghyr, Bengal Secretariate book depo, Calcutta, 1926, reprint, Delhi, 2007.

VII) Blunt, E.A.H.; The caste system of northern India, S. Chand & co., Delhi, 1969.

VIII) Radhakrishnan, Meena; Dishonored by History: criminal tribe & British colonial policy, Orient Black swan, Hyderabad, 2001.

IX) Prasad, Anirudh; People's perception of harijan atrocities in Bihar, A.N. Sinha institute of social studies, Patna, 2005.

X) Singh, Yogendra; Social stratification & changes in India, Manohar publication & dis., Delhi, 2009

XI) Choudhary, Prasana Kumar, Raid on Heaven: Dalit movement in Bihar 1912-2000, Vani Prakasan, Delhi, 2015.

XII) Tiwary, Dr. S.N.; Poverty among Musahar: Dalits of Bihar, Heritage publication, Mumbai, 2015

Research Supervisor

Dr. Abdul Wahab

Assistant Professor

R.K. College

L.N.M.U.

Darbhanga

Research Scholar

Nitish Kumar